

Introduction

The Heart of Meridian Inc, a for profit development corporation, proposes a partnership with the City of Meridian to develop a multi-use facility. The City of Meridian's vision statement directs, "Meridian is a vibrant community whose vision is to be a premier city to live, work, and raise a family." This proposed facility addresses this statement by integrating living, retail and commercial space including on-site parking options for facility users and the public. A primary concern of City of Meridian leadership and staff is to create an increased connection between residents and the heart (or downtown) of Meridian.¹ This is expressed in the City's Comprehensive Plan:

"Meridian's Old Town District seeks to accommodate and encourage further expansion of the historical core of the community; to delineate a centralized activity center; and to encourage its renewal revitalization and growth as the public, quasi public, cultural, financial, and recreational center of the community."²

Revitalizing the Old Town Meridian creates an energy center with a more diverse and resilient living environment and locates residents in the downtown core.

Organizational Structure

The Team is organized as a for profit development corporation. Primary roles for each team members are listed below:

Erik Kingston: Presenter

Kathy Ray: Report Writer & Researcher

Jennifer Yost: Report Writer & Presenter

Kathy Uker: Researcher

Sharon Church-Pratt: Researcher

Strategic Planning

Meridian is attractive to multi-use development due to the leaderships and residents understanding of the value of downtown vitality. Through the adoption of the vertically integrated residential projects as a permitted option in the downtown core, the City recognizes the market advantages of accessibility to jobs, walkability, and quality of life. Building densities and heights also drives connectivity rather than sprawl. A multi-use development supports the services, facilities, and amenities reflecting the downtown's character by incorporating a place to live, work, and raise a family in one location. Urban housing provides a built-in residential community that feeds city center businesses as well. The multi-use facility also establishes a

¹ Interview with Mayor de Weerd 7/20/2009

² City of Meridian Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 5, Section A4, page 36

destination for downtown and takes advantage of the Meridian Downtown Transportation Plan to move *through* traffic to Meridian Road and to move *to* traffic onto Main Street.

With the Meridian Development Corporation's purchase of the H&H Building in 2007, a significant effort towards revitalizing downtown through a public-private partnership was implemented. 'The Hub' project is a multi-use building incorporating retail, restaurants, and office space with street parking and surface parking also planned. This project compliments the City's vision for revitalization. However, it is missing one important component: housing. Having housing near the workplace reduces transportation, infrastructure and environmental costs.³

In general, downtowns boast a higher percentage of young adults and college educated residents than the nation's cities and suburbs. Forty-four percent of downtowners have a bachelors degree or higher. In 1970 young adults represented 13% of residents in downtown compared to 25% in 2000. As stated by the Brookings Institution, "Downtown housing provides visible and tangible evidence of urban vitality that has important psychological and economic impacts."⁴ The demographics of Meridian yields a high rate of families and children in the Treasure Valley; youth, well-to-do young adults, and young families are key markets easily located within the downtown core. Specifically, 21% of Meridian's population is between the ages of 20 and 34 with another 6.2% of the youth entering the workforce in the next four years. Additionally, the older population, between the ages of 55-74 being 12.7% of the population, are a target populations and may be able to access the higher end housing.⁵

With businesses located in downtown it offers an employment source for these populations. Some amenities already residing in downtown Meridian attract these vibrant demographics. These amenities include the Farmer's Market in the new City Hall parking lot, Playin' in the Plaza at Generations Plaza, the Boys and Girls Club, and Concerts on Broadway. Additionally these existing businesses target these demographics including Flatbread Community Oven, El Tenampa, Meridian Cycles, and Library Coffee House.

Economic Development Concept

Heart of Meridian, Inc. proposes a mixed use development comprising a three or four story vertically integrated residential facility. The first floor, dedicated to retail, includes a space for a local food market. This space could provide a permanent location for the McFadden Co-Op or placement of an Albertson Express or other locally owned food markets. Another potential space includes an art studio with an art gallery. The second floor serves as first-class office space with technology integrated to meet the needs of any professional services with the creative class of innovators and entrepreneurs in mind. This facility will take advantage of the City of

³ Idaho Housing and Finance Association

⁴ Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program, Who Lives Downtown

⁵ 2005-2007 American Community Survey, US Census

Meridian wireless system to be implemented in 2009 and serve as a business incentive for locating in downtown. The remaining floor(s) consist of mixed income residential housing.

The project incorporates on-site open space with areas for the display of public art. The open space of the project integrates into Meridian's streetscape requirements to complement pedestrian friendly designs, including appropriate setback, trees, benches, planters, and like-type pathways.⁶ On-site parking is accessed from the rear or side of the facility.⁷ The project includes reserved on-site parking for users of the project with the remaining parking available for public use. Incorporating public parking helps address the limited amount of public off-street parking available in Meridian. Currently it is estimated that only 15% of all off-street parking is public.⁸

The project design incorporates a variety of green development concepts that would lessen the life-cycle costs for users of the facility. Incorporating energy efficient and low-flow fixtures into each residential unit is one concept. Another concept is the implementation of a rain water catchment system that provides on-site watering for green space. More concepts are the incorporation of ground source heat pumps, low-e windows and external wall insulations resulting in cost savings in HVAC equipment.

The project is comprised entirely of rental units. Through a study of rental unit availability, Meridian has a need of rental units with one unit for every 153 persons in Meridian. The proposed units consist of a mix of low-income (below 80% of Area Median Income), workforce housing (80% to 140% Area Median Income) and higher-end housing. This provides housing opportunities for those working in retail in the downtown as well as those in the professional services, including city staff and health care professionals from the St. Lukes Medical facilities.

	Meridian	Boise	Nampa
Rental Units Listed	457	4,957	1,021
Ratio of units to population	153 persons per unit listed	41 persons per unit listed	77 persons per unit listed

⁹

Implementation

Heart of Meridian, Inc. identified three potential sites, which are 906 N. Main (Hubcap Annie), Old City Hall on 34 E. Idaho Street, or the Old Town Library. Reviewing surplus land inventory with the City of Meridian and the Meridian Development Corp is necessary for a better

⁶ City of Meridian Downtown Streetscape Guidelines

⁷ City Code 11-4-3-41

⁸ Limited Parking Supply and Demand Analysis, January 2005

⁹ Housingidaho.com, 7/21/09

understanding of the area as other sites may better meet the needs of the community. The Old Town District is a targeted area for this project as it accommodates and encourages development of an energy center. The intent of the district is to create a centralized activity center and to encourage renewal, revitalization and growth to establish a truly urban city center.¹⁰

The Meridian Development Corporation and the City of Meridian are key partners for a successful project. Possible involvement of other partners associated with the housing and business industry include the following: Meridian Arts Commission, Idaho Housing and Finance Association, BSU Business Development Center, TechConnect, ITT Technical Institute, Super Value (Albertsons), Meridian Chamber of Commerce, Sage Community Resources, Boise Valley Economic Partnership and McFadden Co-Op.

Some of the identified partners are keys in the financial development of the project. The following financial tools benefit the project:

- Meridian Development Corp funding for acquisition of property would result in a public-private partnership benefiting all partners.
- Low Income Housing Tax Credits for the affordable housing component. In the first quarter of 2008, investor interest in tax credit bonds are still strong and is expected to continue in the 2nd and 3rd quarter. Low Income Housing Tax Credits would only be a portion of the financing package proposed as it only addresses the housing units dedicated for families with income at or below 80% of Area Median Income.
- Idaho Power Building Efficiency Incentives Program allows up to \$100,000 per project, which helps with the upfront infrastructure for the energy efficiency implementation and results in approximately 30% savings in future energy costs.
- The City of Meridian is encouraged to pursue Franchise Fees and to dedicate them for use in the Old Town District of Downtown. If Franchise Fees are pursued and made available for use in Downtown, the City of Meridian would be a partner in identifying potential uses of the funds in this project.
- Additionally, the City is encouraged to use CDBG funds to address the need for additional wayfinding signage in the Old Town District.
- With the potential use of 'The Hub' building as a business incubator type facility, there may not be a need for another business incubator. However, if this is not the case or the city or the Meridian Development Corp perceives additional incubator space is needed, applying for EDA funding with the assistance of Sage Community Resources will occur.

A multi-use facility incorporating housing brings a built-in residential community that feeds city center. A residential community in downtown brings vitality by providing opportunities to live, work, and raise a family.

¹⁰ City Code 11-2D-1-A